The Effectiveness of ICTs as a Public Relations Tool in Institutions of Higher Learning: A Case of University of Fort Hare University Alice, South Africa

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ABSTRACT The effectiveness of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as a Public Relations Tool in an organization is of vital importance. This study focused on the Effectiveness of ICTs as Public Relations Tools with particular emphasis on University of Fort Hare University Alice, South Africa. The main objectives of this paper were to determine if ICTs are effective tools of communication by DMC, to determine whether the ICTs used by DMC allow UFH publics to respond through the same communication channels, and to ascertain if ICTs enhance the communication process between UFH public relations and institution's publics. The study discovered that DMC at UFH generally uses ICTs effectively for different purposes and the effectiveness of ICTs therefore, is determined by how DMC uses them. The authors therefore recommended that DMC through the University must adopt a policy that utilizes ICTs effectively since UFH is one of the well-established and recognized international institutions of higher learning globally.

INTRODUCTION

A conference hosted by UNESCO highlighted the importance of the use of ICTS. "It is noteworthy that the use of ICTs is more efficient in educational management, governance and administration" (UNESCO 2015). ICTs are generally devised in organizations mainly for the purposes of increasing working competence, eminence and transparency (Zimmermann and Finger 2005: 231). Zimmermann and Finger (2005) further state that the application of ICTs occurs in an environment where the cultural and institutional obstructions are not properly harnessed. According to Thabane (2004: 9), ICTs can be seen as the merging of communications, computing and information technologies. Thabane (2004) further posits that this merging manifested through growth of unique and enhanced services provided within a varied array of technological platforms by organizations, which make use of these ICTs. The benefits of using ICTs are therefore immeasurable, as organizations are able to deliver services to their publics without delay. Interestingly, the University of Fort Hare (UFH) has also implemented various forms of ICTs such as Internet, intranet, website and short message service (SMS) with the purpose of improving and managing communication between both internal and external publics.

However, there are some loopholes that can be detected in the communication process when using some of the ICTs. One of the problems associated with the use of ICTs in the Division of Marketing and Communication (DMC) at University of Fort Hare (UFH) is that asymmetrical communication is being promoted and this prohibits receivers of the information from giving feedback. Rensburg and Cant (2009: 198) state that feedback is an important element of any communication process. Hence, this study seeks to measure the effectiveness of ICTs as public relations tools at University of Fort Hare, as it has been realized that some ICTs such as intranet, short message service (SMS) do not allow UFH publics to respond through the same channels and they promote a one-way communication process. For this reason, public relations should manage all the adapted communication channels for the purpose of promoting interactive communication.

Grunig (1992: 4) explains public relations as controlling of communication within an organization and its publics. To buttress this, Rensburg and Cant (2009: 27) pointed out that, public relations is the management through communication of perception and strategic relationships between an organization and its internal and external stakeholders. This means that through effective use of ICTs, it would be easier for public relations practitioner at UFH to manage and produce effective communication channels for the purpose of having healthy relationships with the institution's publics. Besides all these, Grunig

(1992: 4) further clarifies that public relations and communication management describe the overall planning, execution, and evaluation of an organization's communication with both external and internal publics that affect the ability of an organization to meet its goals.

Moreover, effective communication is regarded as the backbone for every organization. But at the University of Fort Hare (UFH), the communication breakdown between UFH and its publics sometimes occurs due to the lack of up to date facilities such as computers, where both internal and external publics can access information. It would therefore be of paramount importance to assess how ICTs mediate the communication process between UFH and its publics through the DMC office. Sometimes, communication becomes difficult, meaning it tends to be slow and some publics are unable to get information on time due to outdated communication strategies. It is vital to investigate whether ICTs are effective in speeding up the communication process between UFH and its publics. For communication to be more effective there should be facilities, which help participants to be interactive. According to Pavlik (2008), the effective use of ICTs facilitates two-way or interactive dialogs between an organization and its various publics.

The fact that a public relations practitioner has to make sure that the communication process is effective between an organization and its publics, demands that there must be proper and adequate tools for him to communicate more effectively. For this reason, the following technologies including short message service (SMS), Internet and intranet are going to be examined as public relations tools, which the Division of Marketing and Communication (DMC) at University of Fort Hare (UFH) employ to disseminate information to stakeholders.

The fact that the society and the media adopt and use technologies means that public relations practitioners also have to adopt new technologies as their communication tools. For this reason, this study will use a theoretical framework of uses and gratifications, as well as the excellence theory of public relations to show how public relations at the University of Fort Hare uses ICTs and how excellently they are used. Bless et al. (2006: 13) state that theory serves as an orientation for gathering facts, and theory predicts fact. Furthermore, McQuail (2005)

points out that, "theories determine the nature and production of media output or the way individuals interact with and respond to the content with which they are provided by the media". This means that theory stimulates research and enhances the meaning of its findings. The general supposition of the uses and gratifications theory is that consumers have an alternative choice to fulfil their needs. According to Blumler and Katz (1974), uses and gratification theory looks at the publics use media for gratifications of their needs. On the other hand, McQuail (2001) point out that, the uses and gratifications theory endeavors to explicate the practices and the functions of the media for individuals, groups and society in general.

Regarding at the excellence theory of public relations, Grunig (1992) posits that this theory examines the value of public relations in the organization. This theory also consists strategic management of communication that can be used within the ethical standards. Grunig (1992) noted that the excellence theory has developed into a common theory of public relations as a strategic management and current authors are able to formulate concepts and tools, which public relations professionals can use.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this paper are generalized as follows:
- To determine if ICTs are effective tools of communication by DMC.
- To determine whether the ICTs used by DMC allow UFH publics to respond through the same communication channels.
- To ascertain if ICTs enhance communication process between UFH public relations and institution's publics.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The uses and gratifications theoretical method can be convenient in understanding how communication professionals use developing communication technologies for work (Sweetser et al. 2008: 170). Sweetser et al. (2008) further noted that, uses and gratifications perspective approaches media through a user level perspective, concentrating on the user as an active audience. Different studies show that public rela-

tions uses ICTs especially Internet to publicize organization information as well as communicating with publics or stakeholders. According to McQuail (2001), this theory seeks to explain the uses and the functions of the media for individuals, groups and society in general. Furthermore, Blumler et al. (1994) posit that uses and gratification theory looks at how people use media for gratifications of their needs. Similarly, Sweetser et al. (2008) point out that public relations professionals embrace the use of ICTs particularly the Internet as an imperative tool to augment management's capability, enhance environmental monitoring and improve two-way communication with their publics.

As media users become increasingly confronted with choices, this approach should direct attention to public relations or DMC at UFH. The use of ICTs by DMC at the University of Fort Hare depends on the reliability and the purpose of the message that DMC wants to put across to target audiences as well as gratifications that will be received from those ICTs. Chigona et al. (2008) posit that the uses and gratifications theory focuses on motivations for the choice of mass media and mass communication. With this notion, usage of ICTs by DMC is no exception as there might be a motive behind using ICTs to disseminate information to UFH publics. Thus, according to McQuail (2005: 423), comparative sympathy with various media is linked with variances of anticipation and gratifications sought. Attraction to use any type of ICT is encouraged by how fast it is in transmitting information from source to receiver. This means that the choice of certain ICTs such as Internet, intranet and SMS by DMC might be meeting expectations and gratifications DMC is looking for from these media. The basic assumptions of the uses and gratifications theory as suggested by McQuail (2005: 424) are as follows:

- Mass media and content is normally cogent and directed towards definite unambiguous goals and gratifications.
- The general populace is cognizant of the media related needs, which arise in personal and social situations and can voice these in terms of motivations.
- Personal efficacy is a more substantial factor of audience realization than artistic or cultural factor.
- Most of the significant factors for audience construction can, in principle be measured.

Excellence Theory

Grunig (1992) stipulates that the "excellence theory of public relations explains the value of public relations in the organization". This theory also consists of strategic management of communication that can be used within ethical standards. However, Crag (2006) suggests that becoming an excellent communicator means more than just learning how to get results. To clarify, it is crucial for public relations to implement and use ICTs excellently and there must be objectives to be achieved so that proper ICTs can be used more effectively. Grunig (2008) suggest that excellence theory has developed into a common theory of public relations as a strategic management and ongoing research and now is adding perceptions and tools that public relations specialists who serve in strategic role can utilize.

To understand the theory of excellence, Grunig (1992: 6) suggests that the excellent programs of organizational communication are based on what is called symmetrical more often than asymmetrical assumptions. Therefore, by assessing the effectiveness of ICTs as public relations tools at UFH will also help in determining how excellent ICTs are used by public relations practitioner through the office of DMC. Grunig (1992) further stipulates that the excellence theory can be used not only to present what makes great public relations, but also to identify the critical realities and ruptures within public relations practice. On the other hand, Steyn et al. (2005) suggests that excellence study wanted to ascertain a convention of common features of excellent management that contribute to organizational efficiency, and to ascertain the repercussions for the management of organizational communication.

One of the suppositions of the excellence theory as suggested by Steyn et al. (2005: 25) is that organizational communication augments organizational excellence once practiced on macro, meso and micro organizational levels. At the micro organizational level, the preparation, implementation and assessment of organizational communication platforms take place. In this level, resolutions are taken on how to converse with publics by choosing suitable channels to convey the organization's message effectively to the selected target publics. In meso organizational level, the tradition of two-way dignified organizational communication model is adopted

whereby the receiver of information is given chance to give feedback. On the micro level, ICTs such as Internet and intranet have become the most vital media to reach all organizational publics. In the standpoint of this paper, ICTs contribute to all three levels of corporate communication and help public relations execute work more excellently.

Empirical Review

In their study on the impact of ICTs on users in Africa, Adam and Wood (1999) discovered that many scholars in the developed world use simple qualitative tools to measure impact, in state of a comprehensive and prolonged conduct of both qualitative and quantitative techniques. These authors used a purely qualitative approach to examine the interpretative understanding of users of ICTs. Specifically for this paper, the researchers decided to combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches in gathering and interpreting data. This will allow the researcher to identify weaknesses of each approach and how they complement each other.

Steyn et al. (2005) conducted a study, which looked at the theoretical framework concerning the concept of Internet strategy. The results pointed out that, in relation to the corporate communication process, the Internet is considered to be a medium of communication and, as such, can influence all managerial levels. However, with regard the use of the Internet at the functional level managers must ensure that, its use is not decided upon in isolation but forms part of corporate communication goal achievement. According to Steyn et al. (2005), the Internet cannot be utilized on its own but in the perspective of the accomplishment of organizational goals. It can also be utilized as a channel for attaining various efficient objectives, ranging from organizational communication, marketing or any other goal. Further analysis revealed that the Internet as one of the ICTs, which public relations use to execute their work as a censored medium for communication, is sifted by gatekeepers. Research also found that the Internet can proactively allow shareholders to partake in discourse, thus creating collaborative effective relations.

On the other study conducted by Sallot et al. (2004) on the practitioners' web use and observations of their own roles and power, it was found that:

The Internet has been utterly incorporated into every role proficient in public relations.

The web has developed into a universal tool when practitioners plan their campaigns.

Public relations personnel's rigorous use of the Internet for research purposes structurally empowers them.

The web empowers practitioners by providing a means for them to communicate directly with their publics, bypassing traditional "filters" and gate keeping", such as editors in the news media.

Practitioners use the web to pass along carefully packaged information online directly to opinion leaders in an easily digestive form.

Practitioner's use of the web empowers them to improve productivity and efficiency when conducting media relations.

Practitioners are also taking advantage of the web's capabilities to empower themselves to evaluate their programs and campaigns better.

Practitioners use the web to conduct surveillance of activist groups, enabling practitioners to play roles of the strategic management of organizations, increasing their own structural power.

This paper concludes that public relations personnel use the Internet as a "standard operating procedure", as the "ultimate" research tool, as a way to "laser-target" public and improve media relations and to improve relationships with management and clients. Therefore, the current paper found out that the role of ICTs in public relations duties is to enhance and improve the communication process within UFH and that, there is a need for more improvement for PR in terms of using ICTs effectively.

Moreover, Hill and White (2000) conducted research on public relations practitioners' perception on the World Wide Web as communication tool. Qualitative approach and interviews were used to understand the perceptions of public relations practitioners' concerning the use Internet as a communication tool. The results of the study revealed that Internet is a communication tool for public relations practitioners, and is one of many tools they use to share information with an organization's publics. The analysis of this paper further unveiled that public relations personnel assumed that, using this tool requires more time than anticipated and a website was often a low-priority item, both for practitioners who had a number of other responsibilities and

more pressing matters, as well as for other managers in the organization.

Furthermore, participants believed that a website had the potential to provide information to the media, to demonstrate the organization's competitiveness and to build relationships with new and existing publics. Working with a website was perceived to enhance personal skills. However, several issues interfered with the participants' ability to maximize the benefits of website including uncertainty about the value of a website, inadequate evaluation methods, inability to keep the site updated, and quality control expectations. Based on the results of aforementioned discussed research, the current paper further predicts that the effectiveness of ICTs as public relations tools depends on what UFH public relations practitioner wants to achieve.

Finally, Sweetser et al. (2008) conducted a study of credibility and the use of blogs among professionals in the communication industry, the objective of the study was to examine the use, credibility and impact on the communication industry of blogs as seen by professional journalists and public relations practitioners. Respondents were asked several questions about their professional and personal blog use, similar to other technology integration. The results from the analysis of the data showed that blogs are factual and not to be trusted. Respondents were further asked two questions on how blogs impact the industry and their response was that blogs challenge conventional notion of the industry and are not a threat to the industry. The study concludes that communication industry professionals are using blogs as extensions of their normal work. While technology enables them to do more than before, blog usage does not signal a new era of the profession.

This study uses both qualitative and quantitative tools and methods of collecting data as well as analyzing it. The combination of these two methods of data collection is referred to as triangulation and is useful for reducing error thereby increasing the validity and reliability of the research results.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Bless et al. (2006: 71) define research design as specification of the most adequate operations to be performed in order to test a specific hy-pothesis under given conditions. This paper took the form of descriptive and survey research. According to Bless et al. (2006), the research method is generally used when the researcher elicits opinion. This study aimed at measuring and ascertaining the effectiveness of ICTs as public relations tools at the University of Fort Hare (UFH). Descriptive and survey methods were used in order to increase the chances of producing relevant and reliable data. Survey instruments such as questionnaires and focus groups were implemented in this study.

Study Population

Due to the fact that this study is conducted at the UFH Alice campus, internal publics which consist of staff members and students formed part of this study, where they were issued questionnaires and participated in focus groups as to find out their perception on the effectiveness of ICTs that are used by the UFH public relations practitioner. Time, financial and other constraints confined the researcher to select study population in one campus whereas the UFH has three campuses, which are based at Alice, Bisho and East London, respectively.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The internal publics of UFH at the Alice campus comprise of students and employees. Among these publics, questionnaires were issued to a selected sample of males and females with the purpose of reducing bias of the results of this study. About 50 students and 25 staff members were randomly selected to fill the questionnaires.

However, Webster (1985) is of the view that a sample is a finite part of a statistical population whose properties are studied to gain information about the whole. The population was categorized into homogenous groups called strata. Maree (2002) points out that the strata can be formulated through the use of regular groups and it is employed to answer the problem of non-homogenous populace much better. Simple random sampling technique was implemented to select participants from study population, for it provides exactly equal opportunity for each element to be selected. Bless et al. (2006) explain random sampling as a sampling procedure, which provides equal opportunity of selection for each element in a population.

It is because of previously mentioned reasons that this study made use of stratified sampling because participants in this study are from different faculties, departments, age groups and affiliated to different genders. This study will make use of this type of sample when selecting respondents to complete the questionnaire. Seventy-five (75) questionnaires were produced and hand delivered to the selected sample. These questionnaires were divided according to staff members and student levels. All questionnaire copies that were distributed were all returned. This put the questionnaire return rate at one hundred percent.

The authors also used snowball sampling method to select participants for focus groups. This method is often used in cases where the research interest is in an interconnected group. Patton (1990) is of the view that snowball is formulated to classify people by means of precise information, abilities or features that are required as a fragment of a group and or consultative procedure. Snowball sampling uses recommendations to find people with a specific range of skills that has been determined as being useful, such as, snowball sampling aims to make use of community knowledge about those who have skills or information in particular areas. Patton (1990) further points out that the advantages of using such a method are that it helps determine respondents unknown to the researcher and it increases the number of participants in process. The researcher chose such a method because of the previously mentioned advantages. This technique was used under focus groups so that the specific people are chosen to participate.

Experimental Study

An experimental study was conducted to test questions for both questionnaires and focus groups before handing questionnaires out and conducting focus group interviews, respectively. According to Bless et al. (2006: 60), a pilot study allows the evaluator to identify any difficulty with the method or materials and to investigate the accuracy and appropriateness of any instruments that have been developed. It also allows the researcher to determine the likely response to the actual program when it is implemented. In this pilot study, fifteen (15) questionnaires were hand delivered to some of the UHF publics who were asked to fill the questionnaires.

These participants are not going to be included in the main study. One focus group was conducted where issues that relate to the way DMC uses ICTs were discussed as to find out the perception of participants towards effectiveness of ICTs as public relations tools at UFH.

Instrument and Instrumentation

For this paper, questionnaire and focus group discussions were used to collect data. The reason why the researchers decided to use two instruments of collecting data was to allow each instrument to compensate the weaknesses of the other. The questionnaire included close-ended and open-ended questions. The close-ended questions were used in order to allow respondents to select the answers from provided list. Open-ended questions were also employed where respondents were required to express their feelings or speak their minds like "what is your perception on the use of the intranet by institution public relations practitioner?" The kind of information included in questionnaires was personal views towards effectiveness of ICTs at UFH. The focus groups had semi-structured questions.

Data Collection

Data was collected by means of two measurements, a questionnaire and focus groups. The questionnaire included both open and close-ended questions. According to Dominick and Wimmer (2003: 169), open-ended questions give respondents freedom in answering questions and an opportunity to provide in-depth responses and these authors further state that open-ended questions allow for answers that authors did not foresee in designing questionnaires. Moreover, Dominick and Wimmer (2003: 170) further show that in close-ended questions respondents select an answer from a list provided by the researcher. These types of questions provide greater uniformity of response and the answers are easily quantified.

A questionnaire was distributed to all selected respondents and was a self-administered questionnaire. The researchers collected the questionnaires after the respondents had filled in information. The purpose of the questionnaire was also included and this indicated that participation was voluntary and that confidentiality was guaranteed. Adoption of multiple methods in social science research

is called triangulation and these have been endorsed by various researchers because they help overcome errors inherent in the use of one method. For instance, Patton (1990) argues, "Combinations of interviewing, observation, and document analysis are expected in much social science field work." He argues that studies, which adopt only one method "are more vulnerable to errors linked to that particular method than studies that use multiple methods in which different types of data provide cross data validity checks" (Patton 1990: 187-188).

Data Analysis

Le Compte and Schensul (1999) define 'analysis' as the process whereby a researcher reduces data to a story and its interpretations. The data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This statistical software package is intended to specifically analyze social research data and provide researchers with a wide range of capabilities for the entire process of analyzing data. The advantages of using this statistical software package are that it effectively presents results in a tabular and graphical form and reduces time taken in analyzing data, as it is very quick. Before the data was analyzed, the researcher coded the information from the questionnaire to allow easy analysis of data. For example, male was represented as *"M"* while *"F"* represented female.

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyze data. In quantitative analysis of data, information obtained from close-ended questions were expressed into numerical form and data obtained from open-ended questions and focus groups were analyzed using the qualitative method. Bless et al. (2006: 164) state, "Very often quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis play complementary roles in the data analysis process". Descriptive statistics was employed in the data analysis and these include percentages and averages. According to Dominick and Wimmer (1991: 199), descriptive statistics are intended to reduce data sets to allow for easier interpretation. Dominick and Wimmer (1991) further contend that one way researchers can display their data is by distributing them in tables. The researcher presented results in the form of tables, charts and graphs where it is very easy to interpret them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data was collected from staff members of different faculties and students from different levels of study at the University of Fort Hare. Questionnaires were distributed to the selected respondents, which includes staff members from different faculties as well as students. Seventy-five (75) questionnaires were produced and hand delivered to the selected respondents. Among these questionnaires, fifty (50) were given to students and the remaining twenty-five (25) were given to staff members from different faculties. All questionnaires were received and this means that data was analyzed for all the 75 respondents.

The data that had been collected from the selected respondents through the use of self-administered questionnaires were analyzed and put in the form of tables. Also, the data that was collected through the use of focus groups is discussed in the following pages to show how effective are ICTs as public relations tools at UFH.

Effectiveness of ICTs that are used by DMC at the University of Fort Hare

Based on the data collection and analysis, the outcome shows that the majority of the respondents regard intranet as the most effective ICT used by the DMC followed by e-mail and SMS. The results that show the response rate according to how respondents rate the effectiveness of e-mail, intranet and short message services (SMSs) are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Percentages according to how respondents rate ICTs

	E-mail	Intranet	Short Message Services (SMSs)
Strongly agree	45.33%	50.66%	8%
Agree	46.67%	40%	26.67%
Neutral	8%	6.67%	37.33%
Disagree		2.67%	16%
Strongly disagree			12%

E-mail

The results that are depicted in Table 1 shows that 45.33 percent of respondents strongly agree that e-mail is the effective ICT that DMC is using to communicate with internal publics. Other portion of respondents who constituted

46.67 percent agreed that e-mail is appropriate ICT that is being used for internal communication at UFH. However, eight percent of respondents were neutral with the effectiveness of e-mail as an appropriate mode of communication that the DMC is using for internal communication.

Intranet

It can be deduced from Table 1 that majority of respondents felt that intranet is effective electronic mode of communication that the DMC uses for internal communication. This is reflected by 50.66 percent response rate of respondents who strongly agree that intranet is effective. Furthermore, some respondents agreed that intranet is effective method of communication to certain extent. This is supported by response rate of forty percent. On the one hand, 6.67 percent of respondents were neutral on whether intranet is effective mode of communication that DMC is using for dissemination of information within UFH. On the other hand, 2.67 percent of respondents disagreed with effectiveness of intranet as an appropriate ICT that the DMC uses for communication with internal publics.

Short Message Services (SMSs)

The results on the effectiveness of short message services (SMSs) indicated that eight percent of respondents strongly agreed that DMC is using this ICT effectively for internal communication. 26.67 percent of respondents agreed that SMS is also a channel of communication that DMC uses effectively to disseminate information within UFH. Moreover, 37.33 percent of respondents were neutral on whether SMS is effective communication tool that the DMC is using for transmitting information among UFH internal publics or not. Furthermore, the other fraction of respondents disagreed that SMS is effective ICT that DMC is using for internal communication purposes. This is shown by sixteen percent in Table 2. Respondents who strongly disagreed that SMS is effective communication tool that DMC uses for internal communication are represented by twelve percent as shown in Table 1.

The ICT that Internal Publics Deem Most Effective for Internal Communication by DMC

The results in Table 2 show the extent in (percentages) of how selected sample rate e-mail,

intranet and short message services (SMS) as the most effective ICTs that DMC can be used to communicate with internal publics at UFH. The respondents were asked to single out the ICT they deem most effective for DMC for internal communication. Based on the responses, majority of respondents mentioned e-mail as the most effective ICT that DMC can use for internal communication and this is represented by 41.33 percent in the Table. Forty percent of respondents showed that intranet could also be regarded as effective ICT that DMC can use for internal communication. Lastly, 18.67 percent singled out SMS as ICT that can be used for internal communication between DMC and internal publics. The reason for SMS to get least percentage could be the fact that this ICT is not used more regularly like aforementioned ICTs. Based on the results, it can be concluded that DMC are required to use e-mail and intranet as their major channels of communication and also improve the use of SMSs so as to achieve its objectives more easily.

Table 2: The most effective ICT that DMC uses for internal communication

	Frequ- ency	Per- cent	Cumu- lative frequ- ency	Cumu- lative lative percent
E-mail	31	41.33	31	41.33
Intranet	30	40	61	81.33
SMSs	14	18.67	75	100

Challenges that UFH Internal Publics Come Across When Using ICTs to Communicate with DMC

Respondents were asked to specify challenges they come across when they communicate with DMC through ICTs. Fourteen percent of respondents indicated that they never received feedback from DMC whenever they ask for clarification from messages that DMC sends to them. On the one hand, forty-one percent stated that network problem is another factor that makes communication between UFH publics and DMC inactive because sometimes publics are unable to access intranet or e-mails due to the network problem. This portion further indicated that the major stumbling block is the slowness of connecting to the intranet, which at the end of the day discourages them to check their messages from the intranet.

Moreover, two percent of respondents showed that maintenance of server, which is done during working hours also contributes to the problems of having healthy communication with DMC because during this time intranet is not available. They further stated that lack of communication when there is site maintenance also contributes to challenges that internal publics come across, as this affects ICTs that are used between DMC and internal publics for transferring information. Twenty-two percent of respondents indicated that other challenges they come across is that DMC informs them about many things after they have happened long time back. In addition to this, eighteen percent from sample studied indicated that information overload is also a factor that contributes to challenges that hinder them from communicating effectively with DMC, as sometimes they receive more information than they can effectively handle. For this reason, it is clear that important information can be missed and as a result the use of ICTs by DMC will be seen as ineffective. Finally, three percent from respondents reflected that lack of resources like computers is also a challenge they come across, as sometimes they do not get chance to read their e-mails and any other information from intranet because there is a shortage of computers where they can access information from DMC.

Measures to be Taken to Improve Effectiveness of ICTs in Communicating Internal Issues

Respondents were further asked what could be done to improve effectiveness of ICTs in communicating internal issues. Some of them stated that the present situation of the use of ICTs by DMC is very effective for communication purposes. One response from respondents showed that "DMC has stated in its vision and mission statement that it will use effective means of communication to empower stakeholders with pertinent information about the university. Therefore, it will be of paramount importance if ICTs that are used for internal communication are improved in terms of speed, reliability and accessibility to all UFH publics." Moreover, responses from sample study show that DMC staff should be trained on how to use ICTs, as it seems that some of them lack skills in terms of using ICTs. Certain portions of respondents agreed with the notion that, the accomplishment of com-

munication is not dependent on the technological aspect but in the understanding and abilities of communication practitioners utilizing it. For this reason, they noted that skills for the use of ICTs are therefore required from DMC staff, as this will help them be comfortable with ICTs that are used for internal communication and as a result these ICTs will be seen as effective channels to transfer internal information to UFH publics.

Furthermore, small fraction of respondents noted that monitoring and evaluation of the use of ICTs by publics should be implemented so that those who have problems on how to use ICTs get helped and those who misuse them get punishment. However, other participants suggested that availability of ICTs policy that promotes exchange of information among UFH publics should be made known to all publics so that they know how to use these ICTs. For this reason, this will improve effectiveness of ICTs for communicating internal issues. One respondent noted, "For ICTs to be regarded as effective tools of communication by DMC, they should allow two-way communication process and interactivity between DMC and UFH publics." This respondent further indicated that to achieve this, division of marketing and communication has to provide forum where internal publics can discuss complains about communication procedures and this will help DMC improve ICTs usage for communicating internal issues.

General Overview Concerning ICTs that DMC Uses for Internal Communication

Considering research question two, which seeks to find out whether ICTs are effective tools by DMC, the data that has been collected and analyzed reflected that ICTs are effective tools of communication by Division of Marketing and Communication. This is further supported by the question, which the researcher asked from respondents on whether ICTs that DMC uses are appropriate for internal communication. Results derived from this question showed that ICTs are effective tools of communication, as they allow DMC and UFH publics to share, convert, accumulate and establish knowledge, therefore they are appropriate channels of communication that DMC can use for disseminating information and improving interactive and effective internal communication. Other respondents showed that ICTs that the DMC is using are

appropriate for internal communication because they brought possible fundamental changes and improvements in the communication process.

Moreover, some respondents agreed that ICTs that DMC uses are appropriate for internal communication in the sense that they save time for DMC staff for transferring information to UFH publics unlike other modes of communication like meetings, which will need face-to-face interaction. In contrast, other participants felt that the current ICTs that are used by DMC for internal communication need to be improved and other ICTs such as Twitter, blogs and other discussion forums should be used to support e-mail, intranet and SMSs.

Role of ICTs in Disseminating Information within UFH

From 16 students interviewed in the focus groups, seventy-five percent stated that the role of ICTs in disseminating information at UFH is very crucial in terms of keeping internal publics abreast of what is taking place within University. Some of them said that for the fact that organization and institutions are adapting ICTs for internal communication, therefore UFH also has to make use of these ICTs as modes of communication in order to speed up communication process and save time. The other portion of participants indicated that utilization of ICTs helps the sender disseminate information to target publics at once unlike posters and newsletters, which might not reach other internal publics.

However, twenty-five percent of these participants argued that they do not see any changes that ICTs brought in the dissemination of information within UFH. One of the participants noted that:

"Information is very important in keeping people up to date but I personally do not see the impact of these ICTs that are used by DMC in terms of informing internal publics."

For instance, information on the intranet stays there for months without being updated. Moreover, ICTs promote dialogical communication networks by means of which pertinent information needs to be circulated efficiently, accurately and frequently for an organization to build and maintain good relationship with stakeholders.

The Most Preferred ICTs Applied at UFH for Internal Communication

Participants were asked to list in order of preference the three most preferred ICTs applied in UFH internal communication. Fifty percent (50%) of them mentioned intranet as the most preferred mode of internal communication at UFH followed by e-mail and telephone, respectively. Their reasons for mentioning intranet as the most preferred ICT for internal communication at UFH are that they have access to computers where they can log in and read information in the intranet. The other reason is that the intranet is reliable and information that is meant for internal publics can be found more easily whereas some of the internal publics do not read their e-mails and they do not see it as important way of disseminating information within institution.

In contrast, thirty-one percent (31%) of these participants do believe telephone is the most important channel that can be used to communicate information within institution. The fact that this ICT is not part of this study, the researcher did not ask participants to give reasons why they regard telephone as one of important modes of communication within UFH. However, these participants also mentioned e-mail as the second preferred ICT for internal communication at UFH, stating that e-mails that DMC sends to internal public's accounts are more informative and allow the sender to include multimedia elements and links to websites that contain additional follow-up information than general information one can get from intranet.

Furthermore, nineteen percent (19%) of the participants were unable to mention ICTs that are most preferred in UFH internal communication. Their reasons are that all ICTs that are used for internal communication serve the same purpose, which is dissemination of information from sender to receiver, and therefore, they do not see any reason of giving other ICTs priority over others. The other reason is that some of these ICTs are not meant to disseminate information to all UFH publics. One of the participants noted that:

"Since I arrived here at University of Fort Hare, I have never received call or SMS from DMC, so what is the use of saying that other ICTs are preferred modes of internal communication."

Most Preferred Method of Communication for UFH Internal Communication

The researcher also asked participants which method of communication they prefer most for UFH internal communication. Thirty percent of respondents indicated that they prefer intranet for internal communication, as this allows them to receive information about the activities of UFH. Their reason for choosing the intranet as an appropriate method for internal communication at UFH is that everyone within institution have access to computers, therefore, they will be able to receive information directed to them. Moreover, twenty-five percent (25%) of these participants showed that both e-mail and intranet are most reliable modes of communication that can be used for internal communication.

"Critically examining the importance of e-mail and intranet, I do not see the use of separating them because one gets e-mails from intranet. I have never read my e-mails from DMC before browsing the intranet, which is why I am saying e-mail and intranet should be treated as one method of internal communication," said one participant.

Although the intrinsic value of face-to-face communication could never be diminished, the convenience, time and money saving aspects of using ICTs as the main method of internal communication at UFH have to be acknowledged and explored in order to allow interactive communication. However, one participant made it clear that DMC is using ICTs effectively but it should avoid information overload when disseminating information. Moreover, nineteen percent of the participants stated that SMS should be given first priority as messages can be directed straight to receivers unlike intranet or e-mail that cannot be accessible when the server has problems. They further mentioned that SMS could be received when someone is not in the campus, therefore, this need to be used as major mode of internal communication.

On the contrary, other participants (14%) stated that face-to-face communication is one of the most effective and least expensive traditional mediums to disseminate information within the organization. They made examples of meeting where the source of information can clearly explain what he or she wants and can be able to get feedback at the same time. However, other fraction of participants (11%) showed that tra-

ditional media is no longer an effective way of internal communication, as it inhibit two-way communication and interactivity between the role players within institution or organization. They further showed that this could work well if it is supported by ICTs, as they allow two-way communication and interactivity between communicators.

Interactive Nature of ICTs that DMC is using for Internal Communication

Eighty-one percent (81%) of participants from focus groups felt that all the ICTs that DMC uses for internal communication allow them to reply more easily. "There is no way that one can send message and do not allow receiver to respond," said one member of the participants. "DMC sends e-mails to internal publics and expects anyone to reply if he or she wishes to and the ICTs that are used for communication are user friendly in the sense that everyone can reply to message more easily." Nineteen percent (19%) of these participants also felt that ICTs that are used by DMC for communication do not allow receivers a chance to reply more easily. One member from these focus groups pointed out that:

"I once received SMS which wanted me to report to finance office, the number that reflected on my phone was too long and I was not sure if the response will get back to the sender or not."

Besides all this, the ICTs that are used by DMC lack interactivity, and as a result communication process is not that effective. Basing on the above results, it can be concluded that ICTs that are used by DMC allow UFH internal publics to respond through the same channel of communication whereas some respondents indicated that they find it difficult to respond through these ICTs.

Do ICTs Promote Effective Communication between UFH and its Publics?

Moreover, participants were asked whether they think that ICTs enhance communication between DMC and internal publics at University of Fort Hare. Majority of them agreed that it is true that ICTs promote effective communication within UFH. They showed that ICTs allow interactivity and the users are able to communicate

with other users more easily. One participant noted that:

"… The fact that ICTs that are used by DMC allow internal publics to give feedback through the same channel of communication can be seen as promoting effective communication."

Moreover, some participants stated that ICTs like intranet and e-mail could be seen as most crucial channels that promote effective communication within UFH. Their reason for choosing intranet and e-mail as a major ICTs that promote effective internal communication between UFH and its publics is that these ICTs make communicated messages more consistent, accurate and timely and target messages are send to specific publics more easily.

Furthermore, ICTs make communication much faster and in the sense that also more meaningful in that messages are better targeted. For this reason, one student noted:

"ICTs enhance communication between UFH and its publics because they allow publics to give feedback, accelerate the time that messages take to reach the receiver and make communication almost immediate."

ICTs that DMC Uses Effectively to Disseminate Information among UFH Publics

Basing on the results obtained from the discussion it showed that majority of participants consider intranet followed by e-mail as the most ICTs that DMC uses effectively for internal communication at University of Fort Hare. When asked why they do not consider short message services (SMSs) as one of the effective ICT that DMC uses for internal communication, their response was that they never received SMSs from DMC and they do not think that such ICT is used by the division of marketing and communication. Furthermore, the researcher asked them why they choose e-mail as one of the ICTs that DMC uses effectively for internal communication, and their reason was that e-mail messages can be send to publics at any time for less money than mailing a letter or making telephone call. They further showed that the advantage that DMC gets from using e-mail is that it allows for the composition of messages and transmits them in seconds to one or more recipients across the institution.

Moreover, from the discussion in the focus groups it was gathered that DMC also uses telephone effectively even though it is not part of the ICTs that the researcher aimed to investigate. However, other participants showed that the effectiveness of ICT can only be measured based on the specific purpose that DMC uses it for, and therefore, every ICT has certain advantages that could be utilized in disseminating specific type of information to particular type of target stakeholders within organization. For this reason, one participant noted that:

"… One might choose telephone as ICT that DMC uses effectively as it is most personalized, interactive and relatively cost-effective way of communicating with publics."

It is noteworthy that the above results are consistent with the UNESCO conference held in 2015 whose approach was of promoting the use of ICTs in institutions of higher education with specific emphasis on education. It was the conclusion of UNESCO that, "Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can contribute to universal access to education, equity in education, the delivery of quality learning and teaching, teachers' professional development and more efficient education management, governance and administration" (UNESCO 2015).

CONCLUSION

ICTs have become a vital tool in institutions of higher learning such that the ministry of higher and tertiary education is contemplating that there must be a massive roll out of ICTs to all institutions. In this paper it was evident that ICTs play a very significant role for DMC at UFH for it enables the department to be in touch with its publics and work efficiently all the time. This is further cemented by the reasons that participants pointed out, which lead the researchers to the conclusion that when used competently, these ICTs will result in well organized, reputable communication superiority and intensify DMC efficiency, thus making a sound contribution towards the attainment of a mutual relationships between DMC and UFH publics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into consideration the important issues that the study projected, the authors identified some points that can contribute to improving the effectiveness of ICTs that DMC is using for internal communication. Therefore, the authors recommend that:

- ICTs facilities need to be implemented within in a clear strategy with enough equipment, infrastructure, network, laboratories and training for DMC staff members.
- DMC should organize meetings with different internal publics and explain to them the importance of reading messages from e-mails or intranet and how these channels of communication can help build mutual relationships within the institution.
- Information and communication technologies (ICTs) should be considered as effective modes of communication. Therefore, DMC has to send timely messages and make sure that information on the website and intranet is updated all the time.
- To achieve its objectives more easily, DMC has to make sure that it employs qualified and professional staff that know how to use ICTs and disseminate timely information to publics.
- ICTs that are used by DMC should be more effective and compatible with objectives that UFH aims to achieve.
- Feedback should be given to the public whenever they ask for clarifications from messages that DMC sends to its respective publics.
- Maintenance of server or site should be done after working hours so that publics are not inhibited from accessing information from intranet.

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